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ABSTRACT

This paper argues that non-credit community college courses can reach more educationally and economically disadvantaged students and better serve them in their pursuit of short-term and long-term goals. The report suggests that these courses are more flexible, less impersonal and bureaucratic, and are more likely to be in community-based facilities, closer to where low-income students live. Non-credit community college education shares the dilemmas of community colleges in general: inadequate funding, over-use of adjunct faculty, and low respect. The paper argues that non-credit education in community colleges represents yet another form of the stratification within postsecondary education, with elite universities at the top, and short-term job training and adult education programs at the very bottom. The report stresses the need to confront and overcome the fundamental inequities in all of higher education, including non-credit programs. Stratification within the community colleges has been furthered through the over-employment of part-time faculty in non-credit programs. The report looked at programs in four community colleges--in one of those programs, there were 12 full-time instructors and 172 part-time or adjunct faculty. Funding issues come into play here. In California, for example, the funding per FTE student is $3,800 per student for credit courses, while it is $1,900 for non-credit students. (Contains 30 references.) (NB)

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COMMUNITY COLLEGES AND THE EQUITY AGENDA:

THE POTENTIAL OF NON-CREDIT EDUCATION

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COMMUNITY COLLEGES AND THE EQUITY AGENDA: THE POTENTIAL OF NON-CREDIT EDUCATION

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Community colleges have prided themselves on their inclusiveness. The rhetoric about "the people's college" and "democracy's open door" has signaled the willingness of these institutions to serve lower-income students, immigrants, students whose parents have never been to college, older students including women returning to the labor force, and other "non-traditional" students. This kind of inclusiveness is part of a old and glorious tradition in American education extending back to the nineteenth century, the tradition of the common school that extended public support of education to everyone, initially for political purposes and then increasingly for occupational reasons. At their best, community colleges and their faculty are committed to their varied students and supportive of them in many ways. As an economics instructor described this mission (Grubb and Associates, 1999, p. 4):

> I find [the community college] very rewarding, exciting, challenging. I tend to think it's probably one of the most important parts of higher education in that, as far as I'm concerned, it's the last real opportunity for many people in our community. You can be a high school dropout, you can have all sorts of problems or issues of your past and as long as the community college is there for you, there's still that hope.

In practice, however, community colleges have never reached the neediest individuals in any great numbers. The younger students coming right after high school

have tended to come from the middle of the distribution — with middling grades, middling income levels, middling (and sometimes inchoate) aspirations for their futures.[1] Many of the older students who return are experienced workers seeking to upgrade their skills; some have been sent by their employers, who tend to support only the most promising workers; and those seeking retraining, in order to find new occupations because of dislocations in the economy, tend to be experienced.

And so, while community college students are "non-traditional" compared to four-year college students — and certainly compared to students at the elite universities like Harvard and Stanford and Berkeley that dominate the writing about postsecondary education — they still tend not to include those who need further education the most: low-income individuals; those with no experience in the labor market, or with employment in low-wage jobs with marginal employers where upgrade training is unlikely to be provided; recent immigrants, without workable English or much familiarity with employment opportunities; those with serious family problems; welfare recipients and the long-term unemployed, many of whom have multiple barriers to employment; those with criminal records or with physical or mental disabilities. These are potential students who in the past have been served — often, we will argue in Section III, ill-served — by adult education, by welfare-related programs, by short-term job training including the Jobs Training Partnership Act (JTPA) and now the Workforce Investment Act (WIA). For simplicity we will refer to them as low-income or low-wage students, but it's important to remember that the *personal* sources of their troubles — as distinct from the *social* sources examined in Section IV — vary substantially.

However, community colleges now engage in a form of education that includes many of these poorly-served students, and which can be further extended to complete the equity agenda that these institutions embrace. Some colleges — not that many, we

suspect, but enough to clarify a pattern and suggest a model — have developed programs of non-credit education that are in every way more welcoming of low-wage students, more supportive of their short-run goals while maintaining their long-run hopes. These programs are more flexible, less impersonal and bureaucratic than the credit divisions of community colleges, and they are more likely to be in community –based facilities, closer to where low-income students live. And, under the right circumstances, they may be able to distinguish carefully among different types of low-income students, and tailor programs to their specific needs — for example, the issues of recent immigrants, or welfare mothers, or high school dropouts. . We outline the advantages of these non-credit programs in Section I, the heart of this paper. Unfortunately, information about non-credit programs is sparse.[2] For this brief paper we have relied on phone interviews with directors of non-credit education and institutional researchers in 13 community colleges in California, Florida, North Carolina, and Wisconsin; we also have interviewed state officials, and we draw on evidence collected in a series of case studies being conducted by the Community College Research Center at Teachers College, Columbia University.

Of course, non-credit education cannot escape the dilemmas of community colleges in general — the inadequate funding, the over-use of adjunct faculty, the low respect. In effect, non-credit education in community colleges represents yet another form of the stratification within postsecondary education, with elite universities at the top, various gradations of progressively less selective universities below them, the credit programs of community colleges above the non-credit divisions, and various short-term job training and adult education programs at the very bottom. This is what we might term a huge *inequity* agenda. This means that improving non-credit programs and completing the equity agenda in large numbers of community colleges requires

confronting and overcoming the fundamental inequalities in all of higher education: inequalities of funding, of status, and of attention.

However, to us there is no other choice than to improve these aspects of community colleges because the alternatives — the freestanding basic skills programs in adult education, the short-term job training efforts in welfare-to-work programs and WIA — are so ineffective, as we argue in Section III, and so poorly linked to the future educational opportunities that provide any decent chance of getting out of poverty. If we as a country are serious about providing equity through education for a range of low-wage workers, then the community college is the place to do it.

However, it's crucial to remember that education can't achieve equity by itself — that equality of opportunity through education has never become reality and cannot possibly be realized at a moment like the present, with the economy heading into a recession. The Education Gospel — the faith that education and training can prepare individuals for the demanding work required by the Knowledge Society, that it can *by itself* guarantee individual success and social growth — has been endlessly repeated for at least a century, and has done much good in promoting education and training for increasing numbers of Americans.[3] But we need to understand its limitations as well, and so in Section IV we outline some forms of active labor market policy (ALMP) that can strengthen the demand for skilled labor at the same time that community colleges can enhance the equity of its supply.

I. The Advantages of Non-Credit Education

At the outset, it's important to clarify that non-credit education in community colleges serves several different purposes. Some courses offered in non-credit divisions[4]

are clearly for upgrade training, including many at highly sophisticated levels; some are for retraining, for individuals who want or need new careers; some are designed for pre-licensing, or preparation for licensing exams in areas like real estate, accounting, and human resources; some are plainly avocational or hobby-related courses, or other forms of community education; and some colleges include customized training for specific employers in their non-credit divisions. It's often difficult to perceive which non-credit offerings focus on the equity agenda rather than upgrade training or retraining, though basic skills courses, ESL classes, and relatively lower-level occupational courses are often intended for low-wage students. For example, one large non-credit program includes occupational programs in appliance repair, catering, electronic assembly and cabling, school bus training, and sheet metal, and the ubiquitous early childhood programs — all entry-level positions that can be achieved with relatively short programs. This ambiguity reflects a basic problem categorizing students as well: a student in upgrade training may be an experienced technician needing to learn a recent electronics process or software program, or an M.B.A. needing a specific accounting course, but she might equally be stuck in a low-paid service or medical job and seeking upgrade training to work her way out of poverty. So non-credit programs can be quite extensive without serving an equity agenda, but on the other hand they may serve this role in and among other purposes.

For similar reasons, it's difficult to get much purchase on the question of how much non-credit education there is, and especially how much supports low-income individuals. There are no national data on non-credit students, and the state-level data vary enormously in their definitions and coverage. Wisconsin's figures illustrate the problems of learning about magnitudes: enrollment in "vocational-adult", which includes all non-credit courses, was 264,320 on a headcount basis in 1999-2000, out of a

total of 453,668, therefore representing 58% of all students; but on a FTE basis non-credit students accounted for only 4,225 out of 58,074, or only 7.3%. Furthermore, it's quite clear from discussions with Wisconsin colleges that the vast majority of non-credit enrollments are for upgrade training, not the equity agenda. In North Carolina, which has much better data than most states, "extension" (non-credit) programs represent 74.5% of all students but only 5.8% of full-time equivalent students (for 1999-2000); this implies that non-credit students are crucial to the community-serving mandates of these colleges, but trivial in terms of their resources. Of the non-credit students, 29% of all enrollments (but 40% of non-credit FTE) are in basic education and programs for the long-term unemployed, 48.3% in occupational courses at various levels, 8.3% in firm-based training, and 14.4% in community service and avocational courses. Therefore a substantial chunk of these non-credit enrollments — but again, a trivial fraction of FTE — serves the equity agenda. Even here, there seem to be problems with duplicated counts of students. For the moment, then, the magnitude of non-credit education in the country remains elusive, though the pattern from these two states seems reasonable — with non-credit enrollments quite large, but small in FTE terms, and with much of this coming from occupational courses that have more to do with upgrading than with equity.

When college administrators refer to their low-income non-credit students, they describe students who are tentative, uncomfortable with big bureaucracies, perhaps unsuccessful in prior efforts to get back into school, and uncertain about their identities as students. Non-credit programs allow them to "get their feet wet", or provide a "first step into college"; there are "no grades, no pressures", reducing the anxieties these students have about college. Non-credit programs are the "last best hope for lots of

students", as one director in California declared; another in North Carolina noted the clear difference between credit and non-credit students:

> It certainly is a different population we're serving. Curriculum [credit education] is serving those who want to pursue a degree. They have the academic ability to do that. Ours [non-credit students] have some gaps in their academic abilities, and we're trying to bring them up. Many do not have high school diplomas. The primary difference is education level already attained, and maybe even their objectives. Non-curriculum [non-credit] folks, many of them, it's a goal to read, or trying to retool and get a skill.

The major advantages of providing non-credit courses and programs for low-wage students include quite a long list — most of which, we should remember, have been cited for community colleges as a whole:

Cost: In many states non-credit programs cost nothing at all, or considerably less than credit courses. In some cases certain types of courses — basic education, for example — are free, while others — hobby courses, usually — require students to pay the full costs. For low-income students, even the modest tuition costs of credit courses may be a serious deterrent.

Open enrollment: Non-credit enrollment usually involves a simple sign-up procedure, without the more complex enrollment process, mandatory placement tests, and counseling referrals that some colleges have instituted for their regular programs. The problem, of course, is that these matriculation procedures are intended to help students find the right courses and programs, though they also operate to discourage potential students who are uncomfortable with impersonal bureaucratic procedures.

Flexibility: Non-credit courses very often start every week or two, rather than at the beginning of conventional semesters. They also tend to be provided at various times of the day, and sometimes on weekends for working adults.

Responsiveness: While community colleges think of themselves as being responsive to new trends and demands, compared to four-year colleges with their

bureaucratic procedures, non-credit programs are much more responsive then the credit programs of community colleges because they typically do not have to go through faculty and Senate approval, state approval mechanisms, or other delays that can take two years or more for credit courses. One non-credit director in North Carolina clarified the procedural differences between credit and non-credit approval process: "If it's something we haven't done before, we make it happen. If you ask one of my curriculum [credit] directors about approval, they moan and groan" because the approval process by the campus, the system office, and the state board takes from one year to eighteen months. The principal importance of flexibility is that non-credit programs can put new programs into place when a specific community need arises, or when a particular kind of occupational course becomes hot.

Location: In colleges with large non-credit divisions, individual centers are located throughout a city, often in community centers, centers for the elderly, the offices of community-based organizations, churches, and other places familiar to the populations they are trying to reach. Not only are these centers physically closer and thus more accessible to low-income adults, but they are widely described as being small-scale, more comfortable than the large central campuses of urban community colleges. More to the point, they can take on distinctive identities: in one city, for example, there are distinctive centers in Latino, in Chinese, and in black neighborhoods, each with a bilingual director and many bilingual staff, with a variety of support services specific to each community. Under these conditions such non-credit centers become what some community-based organizations aspire to be, except that they are also part of a larger college and can therefore provide access to more advanced programs that CBOs cannot provide.

Under these circumstances, neighborhood centers can identify and serve precise needs that might not be identified in other centers. For example, in the Latino population, a substantial fraction of immigrants (about 20%, according to a center director) have had substantial education and were professionals in their home country; their problems are quite different from those of immigrants with little formal schooling, little or no literacy in their native language, and prior employment only in subsistence agriculture. And so neighborhood-based centers can understand their students in ways that would be much more difficult in the large, heterogeneous classroom of regular credit courses.

Access to immigrants: One adult education program in a heavily Latino city noted that prospective students need only a U.S. address to enroll. They do not need to have a green card, or to fill out other paperwork, and this is widely known in the Latino community that is nervous about its immigration status and contact with the INS.[5] In this way, the more informal procedures of non-credit programs reduce the barriers, real or perceived, to enrollment.,

Support services: Many community colleges to which we spoke allow their non-credit students full access to all the support services they provide, including child care, guidance and counseling, and tutoring. (Financial aid is unavailable because it is allowed only for students attending credit programs at least half time; however, since non-credit courses are either free or have reduced fees, this is not usually an issue.) To be sure, these support services are often available only on a main campus, not in every community-based center, so in practice low-income adults may not be able to take advantage of these services. But at least the intention of such programs is to make a full array of support services available. In other cases, however — especially in Florida,

with an emphasis on upgrade training — there appears to be very little access to support services, and in this sense non-credit students seem to be second-class citizens.

The transition to credit programs: Perhaps the greatest advantage of locating non-credit programs for low-income students in community colleges is that, after students have completed a relatively short course, they can take other related courses and, at the end of an appropriate sequence, transfer into credit courses of the community college. As their own desire, time, and life circumstances permit, they can continue with certificate and Associate programs, transfer to baccalaureate programs, and continue on to any form of graduate education. Indeed, there's a modern version of the rags-to-riches myth that sometimes emerges in welfare programs, of a woman who enrolls in non-credit developmental education and vocational courses for a nursing assistant, continues to an Associate program in nursing, later transfers to a four-year college, graduates and goes on to medical school! The point is not that this trajectory is *likely*; but it's *possible* within a well-articulated *system* of second-chance education for adults.

The non-credit programs we reviewed vary substantially in their articulation with credit programs at the same college. In Florida, a final exam in certain non-credit course can be used to earn credit; the Maricopa colleges also have a mechanism whereby non-credit courses are converted to credits. One institution has set up articulation agreements, just like those articulating two- and four-year colleges, promising that students who complete a specified roster of non-credit courses can join a credit program and have some of their prior coursework count. This institution runs field trips for students from the various non-credit centers to visit the main campus, to familiarize them with the campus and the various administrative hurdles they will have to leap there. Counselors develop education plans with students, help them with the transfer process and enrolling in credit programs for the first time. The centers are now

reorganizing their counseling to concentrate on particular types of non-credit students (e.g., new students, continuing students, occupational students), with counselors developing greater expertise about the conditions such students face. This institution is one of the very few to keep track of how many students transfer from non-credit to credit every year; over the past few years, about 20% of their *new* students have enrolled from non-credit courses. Given the number of non-credit students in this college, total enrollments are about evenly split between credit and non-credit programs, the number who transfer represent about 6% of all non-credit students (though a longitudinal transfer rate would be somewhat higher). These transfers come largely among students in transitional studies, earning a high school diploma of a GED; among ESL students moving into credit programs; and among business students.

Another college with an active transfer policy is similarly establishing a series of articulation agreements with credit programs in three colleges within the same community college district. The district has also begun to track the numbers of students who transfer: about 2,000 – 3,000 students transfer every year, out of enrollments of about 57,000 in non-credit courses (excluding those for older adults), a number that surprised district administrators who thought it was much lower.. But articulation at this district is still relatively new, and it's possible that the transfer numbers will increase as greater understanding of the possibilities for moving into credit programs develop. A third college has credit instructors recruit non-credit students by speaking to their classes and demonstrating what students will do in subsequent courses; they also have support services including counseling, pushing students aggressively to continue their schooling. About 15% - 20% of their credit students originate in non-credit courses, so among other things the non-credit program is a recruitment mechanism — an important consideration in an enrollment-driven institution.

The mechanisms facilitating transfer from non-credit to credit programs are all easy to identify and quite familiar to colleges: student awareness of credit opportunities, articulation agreements, faculty advice and "advertising", guidance and counseling, individual education plans, and support for students in the transfer and application processes. But the majority of the colleges we interviewed provided very few of these services. In most colleges, it was clear that if non-credit students could find a counselor interested in them, they can get help in the transfer process; but this is idiosyncratic rather than institutionalized and systematic. We could find no evidence of any sort — not even guesstimates — about the magnitude of transfers into credit programs in the colleges in Florida,[6] North Carolina, and Wisconsin. And so, as far as we can see, relatively few colleges use non-credit programs as a transitional stage into community college. In most colleges, non-credit education is not particularly oriented toward the equity agenda, and instead focuses on upgrade training and retraining of the experienced workforce.

Several factors seem to account for colleges that have used their non-credit programs to serve low-income students. Most of them emerged from histories where the college (or a division of the college) had provided adult education in the region; as a result a commitment to low-income students had developed, without competition from adult education programs run by K-12 districts. In addition, a couple of these programs have had strong individuals with clear and compelling visions to serve these students well. Finally, state policy has been permissive, if not particularly encouraging: these states fund non-credit education for equity-related purposes, albeit at lower rates than credit programs (in California, Florida, and North Carolina). As one local director noted, "What they fund is what drives what we offer." But in recession — or, in Florida,

where programs are being pressured to become self-sustaining — serving low-income students may become a lower priority.

From these few colleges, a model emerges of non-credit education as a way of addressing the equity agenda of community colleges. This model operates, in large part, by extending the advantages that community colleges already have over four-year colleges: these non-credit programs are lower in cost, more flexible in their schedules, physically closer to students and more overtly community-based, less bureaucratic, more open to immigrant students, and better able to respond quickly to emerging community and employment needs. Unfortunately, as we'll see in the next section, non-credit programs are also heirs to many of the same problems that community colleges have suffered.

II. The Endless Differentiation of Postsecondary Education: The Dark Side of Non-Credit Education

The community college represents one of many ways in which postsecondary education has been fragmented into institutions of different levels of selectivity and status, aimed at occupational preparation at different levels of the labor market. The development of non-credit programs focused on low-income students represents a further stratification *within* community colleges, and once again differences of funding, status, and pedagogy have emerged.

One obvious problem in non-credit education is that, in most states, it is funded at substantially less than credit education. In California, for example, the funding per FTE student is $3,800 per course for credit students but $1,900 for non-credit students; in North Carolina, reimbursement for non-credit FTE is three-quarters of what it is for

credit FTE. So funding, already low in community colleges, is even lower in non-credit programs.

One result is that non-credit programs use an even higher proportion of adjunct faculty than the credit divisions of community colleges do. While there is no systematic data, one of the non-credit programs we interviewed had 12 full-time instructors and 172 part-time or adjunct faculty. These are situations where the full-time faculty develop courses and hire part-timers, who are essentially treated as cogs in a big education "machine"; part-timers have little time for additional planning, for office hours, for participating in the staff development or the governance committees of the college.

Under conditions where there is low funding and high proportions of adjunct faculty, the quality of teaching — a serious problem in many community colleges, despite their pride in being "teaching institutions" (Grubb and Associates, 1999) — is likely to suffer. Adjunct faculty are usually hired "off the street", with no preparation in teaching methods. They are unable to attend staff development; they have too little time to discuss teaching with their own colleges, or to reflect upon and improve their own teaching. While we did not observe non-credit classes to examine the quality of teaching first-hand, the conditions that would be necessary to improve teaching are simply absent in non-credit programs. As if to corroborate this, one institutional researcher referred to "shitty teachers, with lots of handicaps". In fact, it appeared that the ESL department in the non-credit division had an active faculty, trying to develop a departmental approach to ESL and regularly examining data about their success; the business department was trying to coordinate with other subjects; but the transitional studies department, designed to prepare students for transition to credit programs, was highly traditional, with older instructors not much interested in changing. This is a

story of substantial variation within the non-credit division, which the college — whether through inattention, lack of resources, lack of expertise, or lack of political clout — has not been able to improve.

Furthermore, the large amount of developmental education in non-credit programs — a subject that is especially prone to dreary teaching — cannot possibly enhance the overall commitment to teaching. A great deal of developmental teaching follows the familiar patterns of "skills and drills" (or "drill and kill"), where complex competencies are broken into discrete, decontextualized skills on which students then drill. Another familiar pattern, one which we have directly observed in many developmental classes, is the practice of giving a great deal of emotional support to students to encourage their learning, while not making any substantial cognitive demands on them lest that undermine their self-esteem — a pedagogy of loving students into failure.[7] More generally, there's a great deal of reinforcement in some of these classes for students to stay with an instructor who treats them well, rather than moving into subsequent courses that may be more demanding. Without substantial attention to the difficulties of teaching developmental education and ESL, we fear that the quality of teaching in these non-credit programs is likely to be variable at best.

We also suspect that access to support services is less successful in practice than in theory. It's hard to imagine, given low budgets and lower enrollments in neighborhood centers, that non-credit programs can provide a full roster of services like tutoring and child care. Guidance and counseling in most community colleges is inadequate in amount, and dominated by college counseling intended to provide students with information about requirements to complete credentials and transfer; the kind of career-oriented counseling which students unclear about their futures need is quite rare.[8] Support services are everywhere under-funded, in part because they don't

generate revenues in enrollment-driven formulas; there's no reason to think that poorly-funded non-credit centers can get around this problem.

Another systematic problem in non-credit programs is the issue of credentials. Non-credit programs tend to issue certificates of completion, but these certificates are not recognized by the states in the same way that one-year certificates, two-year Associate degrees, and baccalaureate degrees are. How local employers treat the certificates of completion issued by non-credit programs is anyone's guess. It's possible that certain local non-credit programs work closely with local employers, who then hire the students completing these programs regardless of what credential they have; but it's equally possible that employers don't know much about local programs, or that individuals move away, to areas where the college where they studied isn't known. In general, certain kinds of certificates and most Associates have substantial economic returns, compared to the earnings of high school completers; but the benefits for small amounts of coursework is low and quite uncertain; the implication is that small amounts of non-credit education may not have much effect on employment and earnings.[9] If this is true, then the main benefit of completing non-credit education would be its value in gaining access to more advanced credit programs.

Particularly in North Carolina a confusing discussion has taken place asserting that employers want "skills, not credentials" — that they value their employees for the skills they have and can demonstrate on the job, not for the empty pieces of paper they may have earned. Aside from the fact that this statement is based entirely on anecdotal evidence, it seems to justify teaching limited skills for entry-level jobs, rather than coherent sequences of competencies that might prepare an individual for a career over a lifetime. In addition, the assertion that employers want "skills, not credentials" avoids the question of how an employer knows that a prospective hire has the skills necessary

for the job. There are various indicators or signals of these skills including work experience, the recommendation of a prior employer, the recommendation of a trusted instructor, and receipt of a credential of some sort; but in the absence of some indicator of skills, an employer would be forced to hire individuals at random, presumably on a temporary basis, and then let them go if they proved not to have the necessary skills — an inefficient hiring process requiring substantial turnover. Perhaps during an economic boom, when employers are trying to hire any warm body, the mantra of "skills, not credentials" might be right. But in any period when an employer has some choice among applicants (and particularly in a recession), it's reasonable to think that employers would demand some evidence of skill. So, without better evidence to the contrary, it may be that non-credit programs are effective only when they give students access to widely-recognized credentials.

Finally, there's the important issue of respect and status. Community colleges lack status relative to four-year colleges, of course; within them, the transfer programs have the greatest status, developmental programs have the least status, and non-credit programs have substantially less status than credit programs. As one administrator noted, "credit education gets all the rah-rah"; many described non-credit education as the institution's "stepchild". Non-credit programs are often physically segregated from the rest of a college, in community-based centers or in a separate facility elsewhere in the community; they are then literally invisible as well as institutionally invisible, their faculties don't get a chance to meet faculty teaching credit courses, and their students don't mingle either. Virtually every administrator noted the problem of low status, with non-credit programs being ignored in long-run planning, in faculty allocations, and in the overall sense of the college's mission. The only possible exceptions are continuing education courses for professionals, especially important in Florida.

Many administrators predict that non-credit enrollments will keep growing faster than credit enrollments, and this may rescue non-credit education from oblivion. However, it's likely that much of this growth — in enrollment as well as status — is likely to come from professional continuing education, upgrade training, and customized training, where colleges can boast they are serving the large, economically important employers of their communities. If an administrator operates a non-credit division that combines contract training and continuing education with developmental education and other programs for low-income students, then the institutional incentives will always be to enhance programs working with wealthy corporations, not with the voiceless, powerless poor and unemployed. This is true in every educational institution, of course, but it is recreated even in the community college that prides itself as being the "people's college".

In the end, extending and improving non-credit education so that it can better serve the equity agenda requires confronting a series of systematic issues that plague the credit programs of community colleges too: under-funding; the low political power of the poor; multiple barriers and higher costs in an institutions sensitive to the marginal costs and the marginal resources generated by different students; the need for student support services; the need for improved developmental education. In all too many colleges, the equity agenda is at the bottom of their many missions. Fortunately, there have been many experiments around the country, and many states and colleges that have made progress on the issues of funding inequities, the use of adjunct faculty, the improvement of teaching, and the development of internally cohesive colleges — true *community* colleges. It remains to extend these experiments to the other colleges in the land.

III. What's the Alternative?

The Sorry State of Adult Education and Job Training

For the various types of low-income adults who need access to education and training, but don't live near a community college with active non-credit programs or other outreach activities, what are the alternatives? In the past, these individuals have been served in a motley mixture of local programs including adult schools administered by K-12 districts, usually offering Adult Basic Education (ABE), Adult Secondary Education (ASE) leading to a GED, ESL, citizenship training, and sometimes limited vocational courses leading to entry-level occupations. In some states, area vocational schools provide adult courses, usually in short programs (15 weeks or less) leading to poorly-paid entry-level jobs. Job training programs have been available to welfare recipients under Welfare to Work and to others under the Workforce Investment Act (WIA), the successor to the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) of the 1980s and 90s. In most local communities, there has been a wide spectrum of education and training alternatives, in most cases poorly coordinated with offerings in the educational system but providing potential routes into employment for the working poor, for immigrants, for dislocated workers, and for welfare recipients (Grubb and McDonnell, 1996).

However, the quality of these offerings has been quite poor. Job training programs for welfare recipients and the long-term unemployed have consistently been found to have trivial effects on employment and earnings, not large enough to help individuals work their way out of poverty or welfare; some of them even have negative effects, especially for youth. Even programs that have positive effects in the short run turn out to be ineffective over five or six years, and the initial benefits of increasing the

amount of employment dissipate.[10] Furthermore, the WIA legislation took a mediocre job training program and made it worse, in at least two distinct ways. One is that individuals wanting training have to go through two stages of job search before getting access to training, a requirement that transformed WIA into a "work first" program with training only as a last resort, only for individuals who cannot find any kind of job on their own. Secondly, those who are eligible for training are given Individual Training Accounts (ITAs), a kind of voucher that they can exchange for training from a list of "approved" providers. But the implementation of WIA has been slow, and at this moment there have been almost no ITAs handed out; as a result WIA has ceased to be a vehicle for providing any substantial amounts of training. Furthermore, many community colleges want nothing to do with WIA because the "work first" requirements send them only the most difficult students, because the paperwork required to participate is extremely burdensome, because the performance measures necessary to participate in WIA are difficult to collect and narrowly defined, and because under the best of circumstances WIA would not send colleges many students — at a time when most colleges are besieged with "regular" students. So many community colleges will not be on the rosters of "approved" providers, thereby preventing WIA clients from gaining access to the mainstream of education.

Adult education is, by and large, in similarly miserable shape.[11] With the possible exception of ESL, where adult students are highly motivated, attendance in adult ed programs is sporadic, and usually too limited to make much progress. The teaching, often by part-time instructors hired off the street, is usually the most dreary kind of "skills and drills"; it is usually focused on getting students to pass the GED, a credential of dubious value in the labor market.[12] Even though adult education is often revered because of its saintly connection to literacy, there's virtually no evidence that any of its

programs work. The few studies in the literature with positive results are seriously flawed, [13] and even these acknowledge that gains are small. For example, Diekhoff (1988) claims that "there is little doubt that the average literacy program participant achieves a statistically significant improvement in reading skill" (p. 625), citing a 1974 study for the Office of Education that documented a half grade reading gain over a four month period. But given the limited amount of time most adults spend in ABE, with only twenty percent enrolling for longer than one year, most ABE students improve by one year or less, and their gains—from a fifth to a sixth grade reading level, for example—are trivial in practical terms. As he concludes (p. 629):

> Adult literacy programs have failed to produce life-changing improvements in reading ability that are often suggested by published evaluations of these programs. It is true that a handful of adults do make substantial meaningful improvements, but the average participant gains only one or two reading grade levels and is still functionally illiterate by almost any standard when he or she leaves training. But published literacy program evaluations often ignore this fact. Instead of providing needed constructive criticism, these evaluations often read like funding proposals or public relations releases.

This literature generally confirms the information from our own surveys (Grubb and Kalman, 1996) — of a large, unwieldy set of programs, lacking any systematic information about completion or progress, with virtually no evidence of success.

But the worst aspect of current adult education and job training programs is that they lead nowhere. Once an individual has completed a 15-week job training program, there is no natural next program — and since such short programs are inadequate to find meaningful employment (especially in a recession) the individual must begin the process of search for training alternatives all over again. Individuals can stay for long periods of time in adult education, of course, and some of them do earn GEDs; but the effects on employment are trivial, and the benefits in gaining access to postsecondary

education are similarly trivial (Quinn and Haberman, 1986). So once again, the graduates of adult education programs are likely to be left behind in the low-skilled labor market, not able to earn enough to escape from poverty.

Under these conditions, the crying need is to articulate job training and adult education programs to mainstream educational opportunities. Indeed, a few such efforts have been developed, especially Project QUEST in San Antonio profiled by Osterman and Lautsch (1996). In this case a community-based organization serves to recruit clients and represent their interests, and also provides more intensive support services. The program targets high-growth jobs, particularly in health care and computer occupations, that are accessible to a population with relatively little education; the local community colleges provide remedial and occupational education in two-year programs, and participants earn credits so they can continue in other educational programs later. The division of labor between the community-based organization and the community college is instructive: the CBO provides a vision of the program, recruitment, various support services, and an advocacy role for its clients, while the colleges provide the educational components. However, WIA has made this kind of cooperation infinitely more difficult, because it requires providers to certify their results before being placed on the list of approved providers; and the dislike of community colleges for WIA means that fewer of them are likely to want to get into complex arrangements with CBOs merely to enroll a few more students.

Similarly, a form of articulation between adult education programs and community colleges seems possible, where adults progress through adult education programs and then transfer to community colleges to continue to work toward credentials with more value in the labor market than the GED. But uniformly colleges that have approached local adult schools report being rebuffed, and we have never seen

any examples where adult schools cooperate with community colleges to create "ladders" of educational opportunities.[14]

We conclude, therefore, that the tactic of coordinating existing job training programs and adult schools with community colleges is probably unworkable, because WIA has made this more difficult for job training and because adult schools show no signs of being willing to cooperate with colleges. Therefore the only workable, large-scale solution to creating initial education and training opportunities for low-income individuals, and then allowing them access to mainstream educational opportunities, is to provide access through community colleges themselves. In this effort, non-credit programs have several distinct advantages, as we clarified in Section I, though it's crucial to be realistic about the many barriers examined in Section II.

In order to make this kind of approach a reality, several reforms could be started. The fist step, as always, is to clarify to colleges the value of non-credit education — of functional equivalents like bridge programs — as an entry point. A second is to obtain funding, presumably from existing state and federal resources; in addition to clarifying the role of states in funding non-credit programs, existing funds for job training and for adult education could be transferred to community colleges. A third is to be sure that the quality of such programs is substantial, including the quality of the inevitable developmental education and ESL. The importance of support services and of articulation with credit courses is also central to such programs. None of these is conceptually difficult, though efforts to put them in place would undoubtedly reveal the political complexities of the equity agenda.

IV. The Limits of the Education Gospel and the

Need for Active Labor Market Policies

The use of non-credit education, or community colleges in general, to address the problems of low-income adults trying to improve their employment and earnings is part of a an educational strategy that extends back over at least a century. Around 1900, reformers tried to reduce high-school dropouts and "laggards" (those falling behind in high school) as a way of reducing the likelihood that they would then go into dead-end, poorly-paid jobs. Vocational education was part of the solution then, and it continues in the impulse to provide occupational forms of education throughout formal schooling.

More recently the importance of education has been promoted in virtually all countries, a policy narrative[15] that justifies greater public concern and governmental intervention. It goes something like this: the Knowledge Revolution (or the Information Society) is changing the nature of work, increasing the skills required for the 21st century in virtually all employment and shifting the skills required toward "higher-order" (or SCANS skills) including communications skills, problem-solving, and initiative. Individuals are more likely to find their skills becoming obsolete and changing their employment as firms change their technologies and products, and therefore lifelong learning is necessary to keep up with these changes. In many countries the growth of contingent labor — of employers hiring temporary rather than permanent workers — has exacerbated job-changing and made lifelong learning even more necessary. International competition has increased, and because no developed country wants to fall into the ranks of undeveloped countries relying on raw material and unskilled labor, the need for greater levels of education and training over the lifespan is even more compelling.

This narrative is now so widely accepted and so widely supported by evidence and anecdote, among policy-makers and employers as well as educators and representatives of labor, that it has taken on the aura of a new religion; as Kwon (2001) described it, "the idea of a knowledge-based economy is enthusiastically treated like a gospel among Korean people".[16] And so we will refer to this complex of ideas as the education gospel, motivating policy in all of education as well as job training. The education gospel creates a new importance for postsecondary education, not just K-12 education, particularly because of the view that more workers will need postsecondary education; it posits public as well as private benefits; and it stresses vocational purposes to the near-exclusion of other goals.

Now, there's a great deal of truth to the education gospel. However, there are also serious flaws in this view of the world. One is that the extent and speed of transformations at work are often exaggerated: many jobs remain unskilled, many jobs are untouched by new technologies or new forms of work organizations, and the pace of change has been slow enough that — with a few exceptions, particularly in information technology — the normal workings of education and training markets are adequate to keep pace with changes. A second problem is that, in some places, the issue is less one of insufficient numbers of skilled workers than one of inadequate numbers of challenging jobs, resulting in the underemployment of relatively skilled workers and over-education rather than under-education.[17] A third issue is that the education gospel is often too simple: many renditions of this narrative stress the computer "revolution" and changes in technology, but they fail to confront changes in work organization including contingent work. Fourth, the education gospel often assumes that employers know what kinds of skills they need, and speak with one voice. Instead employers are often unable to identify their requirements, exaggerate the skills they need, and are

unable to project their demand very far into the future. Furthermore, employers vary substantially in what they need; for example, small and medium-sized employers (SMEs) often demand workers with job-ready, specific skills while large employers want employees more broadly prepared for the long run.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the education gospel assumes that increases in education and changes in education policy can cure all ills, social and individual, including poverty; as Michael Bloomberg, the new mayor of New York, claimed recently, if schools are improved then "a lot of what Dr. [Martin Luther] King wanted to accomplish in our society will take care of itself".[18] But this is clearly not true. Partly this is because the equity agenda remains chronically under-funded and under-developed, as weaknesses in non-credit education attest. Partly this is because, even under the best of circumstances, reducing inequality, poverty, and other social problems requires more than what education can do. In the case of unemployment, for example, which has motivated many countries to increase education and training, such supply-side policies can reduce unemployment due to a mismatch of demand and supply, where there are shortages of certain (high-skilled) workers while there are surpluses of (low-skilled) workers; but they can do nothing about cyclical unemployment due to variation in demand or to periodic shocks to an economy (like the recent concern with terrorism) or to structural unemployment caused by inadequate growth. In still other cases the realization of educational reforms requires changes in non-educational policies. For example, the expansion of postsecondary education often requires individuals to have leaves from employment and income support while they return to school, and this in turn requires appropriate employment leave and income support policies.

Therefore it's inadequate — particularly as our country heads into a recession — to emphasize education and training as the *only* solutions to the problems of unemployment, low incomes, poverty, and integration into mainstream economic institutions. The other policies necessary, and in many ways complementary to education and training policies, are those that Europeans call Active Labor Market Policies (ALMP). While conceptions of ALMP vary,[19] they usually include fiscal and monetary policy to reduce unemployment; manpower policy covering job training (but not education), labor matching efforts including job banks, sometimes career information and counseling, and apprenticeship policies; unemployment insurance ; income support for low-income individuals, including direct funding (like welfare policies) as well as tax credits; legislation covering organized labor, wages, and working conditions, including minimum wage laws and employment leaves; health and safety legislation; retirement policies; anti-discrimination policies, for women and minority groups; some aspects of trade policy, including tariffs on goods assembled abroad and efforts to prevent the export of jobs; and the use and potential creation of tripartite groups (including business, labor, and government) to plan policies.

In general, ALMP policies seek to hold down unemployment, to alleviate income inequality and policy, to improve working conditions, and to strengthen the bargaining power of labor. These are obvious social goals in their own right, particularly when a period of economic growth is being succeeded by a recession; ALMP can, for example, reduce unemployment where education and training cannot, and can reduce inequality where it seems that education policies can only make a small dent in the problem.

In addition, ALMP and postsecondary education are potentially complementary to one another, and the right kinds of ALMP can make non-credit and community college education more effective. For example, community college students often drop

out because they cannot go to school, attend to family responsibilities, and work simultaneously; therefore expanded programs of income support — through improved forms of Unemployment Insurance, for example, or employment leave policies, or expanded student aid programs — would make it easier for prospective students to enroll *and complete* the programs they need. Students need certain support services, and a system of universal child care (as many European countries have) would not place the burden on colleges themselves to provide child care. Similarly, guidance and counseling in this country have been responsibilities of educational institutions including community colleges, narrowing the scope of the counseling that can be provided; this also makes its funding contingent on institutional funding, and counseling is often one of the first services to be cut in a recession. The alternative — a national service for guidance and counseling, such as Great Britain has — might make guidance and counseling more widely available, less susceptible to institutional funding, and broader and less institutionally-specific.[20] Periods of unemployment cause individuals to return to school, just as public funding is likely to be cut and as employment prospects become dim; a national ALMP could instead provide a policy of counter-cyclical education and training, with more support for education during recessions when employees are more likely to leave work. And anything that ALMP could do to reduce the high levels of inequality in this country might improve the achievement gap between low-income and high-income students in this country.

So a country with generous employment leaves, a generous unemployment insurance system, adequate child care, a national system of information and guidance, a commitment to maintaining high employment and to reducing regional differences in unemployment rates, and policies to reduce the extent of poverty also creates the conditions where individuals can attend and benefit from a broader range of

postsecondary education. Conversely, the danger in countries with weak ALMP is that education and training come to be viewed as *substitutes* for rather than *complements* to ALMP, an attempt to reduce unemployment and improve working conditions simply by expanding education — the hope of the education gospel. But if unemployment is high and poverty widespread, then there is little that postsecondary education by itself can do to alleviate these social problems.

Over the long run, then, one of the critical transformations in political culture necessary in this country is the development of ALMP policies. If our country is serious about fulfilling the promise of education and the terms of the education gospel, then other aspects of policy more directly related to inequality and employment must change as well.

FOOTNOTES

[1] Our work on this is now somewhat out of date; see Grubb (1987) for these patterns based on the High School and Beyond study of 1980 high school graduates. However, it's clear that these patterns still hold: roughly 30% of high school graduates go to four-year colleges, 30% go to two-year colleges, the remaining 40% tend not go to any form of postsecondary education — and of course high school dropouts also tend not to attend any longer.

[2] There's very little information about non-credit education except sometimes at the state level; federal statistics do not include non-credit courses. It's difficult even to understand the magnitude of non-credit education, since the statistics are not comparable among states. For a handful of recent citations, see "The Role of Non-Credit Courses in the Future of Community Colleges", Information Bulletin, ERIC Clearinghouse for Community Colleges, University of California, Los Angeles, Summer 2001. For older references see also Cohen, Palmer, and Zwemer (1986), Ch. 10 on "Continuing Education and Community Services".

[3] The rise of vocationalism and its manifestation in the Education Gospel is the subject of Grubb and Lazerson (in progress).

[4] There are endless terminology problems, and we cannot clarify them in this short paper. Colleges sometimes have divisions of non-credit education; others label this continuing education or community education. The Chicago colleges have bridge programs that play the same role. In some states (including North Carolina) contract education for specific employers is located within Contract and Continuing Education divisions, combining programs for very different populations. In addition, in some institutions there are non-credit courses, not-for-credit courses, zero-credit components of other courses (e.g., workshops and labs), credit courses that count for community college credentials but not for four-year college transfer, and credit courses that count for everything. Straightening out these technical complexities is, as they say, beyond the scope of this paper.

[5] However, another center serving a Latino population denied that the lack of a green card was a particular barrier, though it might a financial barrier because students without green cards would have to pay out-of-state tuition.

[6] Even though Florida has an excellent student tracking system, FETPIP, it is focused on credit students; following non-credit students is virtually impossible, even for counselors.

[7] See especially Grubb and Associates (1999), Ch. 5 on teaching in developmental education, and Ch. 1 on the "student support" approach to teaching.

[8] These results come from work in progress in eighteen community colleges, carried out by the Community College Research Center, Teachers College, Columbia University. See also Grubb (2001).

[9] See Grubb (1999), also forthcoming in the *Economics of Education Review*. In these and all other statistical results, only credit courses are included, and so strictly speaking there has been no analysis of the economic effects of non-credit education.

[10] There's a virtual industry summarizing the meager effects of training; see Grubb, 1996; LaLonde, 1995; U.S.D.O.L., 1995; Fischer and Cordray, 1996; O'Neill and O'Neill, 1997; Strawn, 1998.

[11] Adult education is so decentralized and so varied that some interesting programs can be found. However, in our experience they are usually idiosyncratic efforts disconnected from the main body of adult ed programs.

[12] The evidence suggests that completion of a GED has at best a very small effect on subsequent earnings, compared to dropouts who have not earned a GED; see Cameron and Heckman (1993) and Murnane, Willett, and Boudett (1995). Educators who have worked with the GED tend to report that is the equivalent of an eighth or ninth grade education, not completion of a high school diploma — and this judgement is in effect confirmed by the evaluation results.

[13] See, for example, Balmuth (1985, 1988), Darkenwald (1986), Kazemek (1988), and Sticht (1988). The exhaustive literature review by Solorzano, Stecher, and Perez (1989) included no outcome evaluations despite their attempt to collect them. An evaluation of federally-funded programs sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education has been undertaken by Development Associates, Arlington, Virginia, but it resulted in no outcome studies at all; see Young, Fitzgerald, and Morgan (1994). For a review with some positive findings, see Mahaffy (1983); however, most of the studies he cites have obvious validity problems because they depend on opinion surveys of ABE administrators. Darkenwald (1986) cites a study by Kent examining pre- and post-tests over a five month period, with an average gain of 0.5 grade levels in reading and 0.3 grade levels in math (p. 7); another result, from an MDTA program, found increases of 0.4 grade levels after fifty-four hours of instruction. Paltry as they are, these gains may be due to selection effects, regression to the mean, practice effects, and other artifacts.

[14] This information comes from an 18-college study being undertaken by the Community College Research Center, Teachers College, Columbia University. The case studies not yet completed, so it's possible that we will find more substantial cooperation in the future, but we doubt it. Other sources that found no evidence of adult education collaborating with other education programs include Grubb and McDonnell (1996), who investigated the complex of education and training programs in eight local communities, and Grubb and Kalman (1994), who examined all possible remedial education in other communities.

[15] We've been impressed with the extent to which policy in many countries is driven by narratives, or widely-accepted and simple "stories" about why certain programs are worthwhile. The creation of such narratives typically takes a considerable period of time, simple but powerful evidence, and many different participants. Once widely accepted, policy narratives are resistant to change, and subtle empirical evidence — the kinds of results that research can generate — is not usually enough to modify or complicate a policy narrative. See, for example, Roe (1994).

[16] See also Swift (2000), who mentions in passing the "training gospel" in Canada.

[17] See especially Livingstone (1999) for Canada and the U.S. An analogous problem is that of over-education, which has long been a fear in developed countries. Recent results corroborate the finding that about 35 - 40 percent of the labor force in the U.S. may be over-educated, even though over-education may have declined slightly during the 1980s. See especially Daly, Buchel, and Duncan (2000), and the review of studies in Hartog (2000). See more generally the special issue of *Economics of Education Review* on over-education, Vol. 19 (2000).

[18] See Richard Rothstein's column, "Linking Infant Mortality to Schooling and Stress", in the *New York Times*, Feb. 6, 2002, p. A20.

[19] See also Esping-Anderson's (1990) conception of welfare capitalism, which covers the elements of ALMP.

[20] The Department of Labor may think that the One-Stop Centers constitute a national system of career information and guidance, but we're skeptical: most individuals get information only, and no guidance; these programs have historically had connections to low-wage and marginal employers rather than large employers; and we see no indication that employees in these Centers are trained for the difficult counseling function. It is, however, still too early to tell how these Centers will evolve.

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